

The Sonic Youth front has been a hive of activity of late, so I didn't mind being kept waiting half an hour for Kim Gordon to return from a movie (*Total Eclipse*) on a well deserved day off. When I finally connected with her it was around midnight, San Francisco time, which made my being at work at 9PM seem a lot more palatable. Since their last album (*Experimental, Jetset, Trash and No Star*), Sonic Youth have toured with REM, headlined *Lollapalooza*, recorded a new album called *Washing Machine* and begun touring in support of it. Kim has launched a line of clothing (X-Girl), and given birth to a bona fide sonic youth named Coco Hayley Gordon Moore (the double-banger surname boasting the pedigree of one half of her mom and dad Thurston's band). The latter event provided a hiatus that gave rise to a myriad of musical side projects and, in turn, saw the band bring a new lease of life to the recording of *Washing Machine*.

"I think we were sorta refreshed," says Kim. "It was good to take a break from the kind of ritual of putting out a record and touring. When we came to write the new songs, we were really into playing. You always try and start writing music like it's the first time, and it was easier to imagine it."

Kim makes up a third of the gorgeous triple-guitar assault at the centre of *Washing Machine*. She uses a tuning which she also uses in Free Kitten (her band with Julie Cafritz, ex-Pussy Galore), and doesn't pick up the bass once. No one does. As well as returning Kim to guitar duties (which she did a bit of in Sonic Youth's early days), the band returned themselves to production duties.

"We always did it before," says Kim. "We decided to have a producer a few records back just to help organise, because we got tired of sorta bickering. It's easier. But then, y'know, we just really didn't wanna pay the money [laughs]. It turned out okay."

Is the bickering over for the time being? "Yeah, I think so. I mean, well, there's always some, but I think having food distractions and things like that really helps," Kim laughs. (In fact, food played such a big part in the recording of *Washing Machine* that a place called Payne's BBQ even features in the scant thank-you credits.) "We didn't really have that much time. We were so busy before we went on tour with REM, so we couldn't really obsess over things."

Reading a cross-section of reviews for the finished product would be enough to teach anyone not to try and analyse lyrics. As straightforward as two songs in particular, 'Panty Lies' and 'Little Trouble Girl', sound, they've been subjected to some wildly diverse and painfully earnest interpretations. Kim sets the record straight.

"'Panty Lies' — I guess it's about role models and what's expected of you... doing things to get attention, being bad to get attention, how it's fun to be bad. It's really meant to be over the top. I was actually trying to sing it with an English accent [laughs], but it didn't quite work."

"'Little Trouble Girl' — Alison Anders, the director, asked me to write a Shangrilas-type song for this movie she's doing. I think it's called *Grace of My Heart*. She wanted to film a group like the Shangrilas in the studio, so she wanted to have them singing our music. I've always really liked [the Shangrilas'] songs and

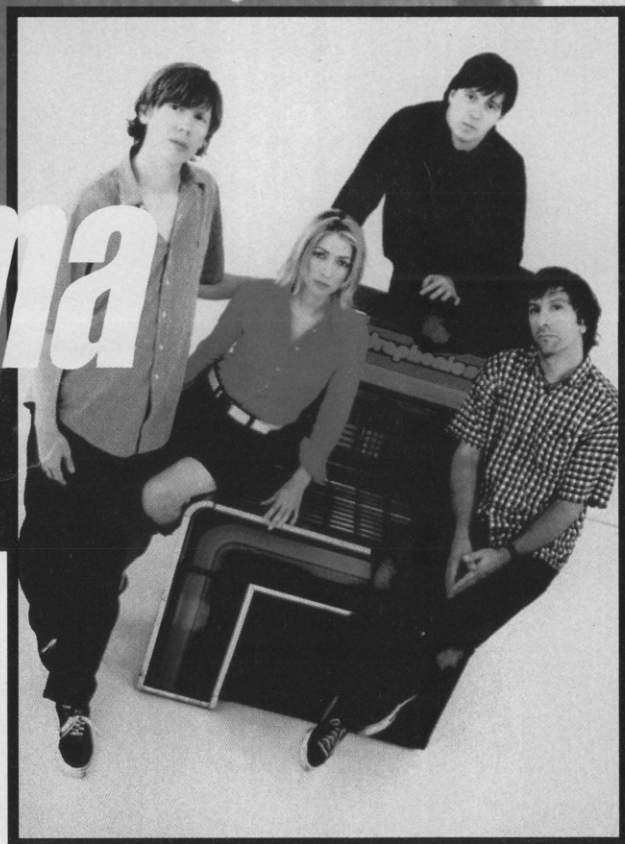
definitely been influenced by them — like in songs like 'Tunic [(Song for Karen)]', but they were all sort of morbid, and I wanted to update it to focus on an aspect of girls growing up, how there's this pressure to only be good or be perfect. So, the song's sort of a girl saying to her mom: 'Well, if you don't really wanna know all of me, if you don't wanna know these bad things about me, then you won't know me.'"

Aah, the wonders of adolescent girls. Kim and Thurston are sure to find out plenty about them soon enough. Coco (she's the one hanging off Thurston on the inside cover of *Washing Machine*) is currently on the road with Sonic Youth, and handling it well.

"She likes music a lot. It's funny, when she hears a Bikini Kill single, or something, she really gets into it. She actually hasn't seen anyone too much on stage, 'cause she is just getting used to wearing her earmuffs. She's usually asleep by the time we go on."

Playing last on the *Lollapalooza* bill, Sonic Youth debuted material off *Washing Machine* to a crowd, at the time, entirely unfamiliar with the material, and including many who would never have even heard the band before. Bearing that in mind, Kim believes it went over really well, with the epic 'Diamond Sea' and the title track being particular crowd pleasers. The band had refused to play *Lollapalooza* previously, holding out for the headline slot so they could play in darkness. Kim says the decision paid off.

"We got to have a light show, and our



music is sorta moody, so that was good. And then, most of the assholes left after Courtney [Love] played."

Good feelings aside, Kim says its impossible to gauge anything from a performance at *Lollapalooza*.

"People just go because it's *Lollapalooza*. Really young kids go, and for a lot of them, it's their first concert they've ever been to, and they don't know anything... a lot of them are babies."

The last time I saw Sonic Youth in concert was when they played Wellington's Saint James Theatre in 1993. The choice of venue (a last minute switch) was a bad one, and Kim remembers it well.

"I remember there wasn't really much security, and this friend of ours, this older gentleman, he ended up doing security on stage. I remember kinda worrying about him. It was a really weird, deep orchestra pit. It was pretty wild. It was really dangerous."

When Sonic Youth play Wellington on January 10, next year, it will be in the obviously more suitable Town Hall. They will play Auckland's Logan Campbell Centre the previous night. Foo Fighters take the place of Kim and (presumably) Coco's unavailable first choice of Bikini Kill to make up the double bill at both shows.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON